THIRD

ANNUAL REPORT

OF

BOFFIN'S BOWER.

1872 & 1873.

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815 WASHINGTON STREET.

BOSTON:
PRINTED BY RAND, AVERY, AND COMPANY.
1873.

REPORT.

This institution was established in 1870 as an exchange for women, providing employment, reading-room, and amusements, *free* to all. At the close of the first year it became evident that the demand for woman's work was equal to the supply; but no one required incompetence, and the difficulty of acting for the parties was indescribably disagreeable, and added to that was an enormous correspondence, requiring incessant labor. Feb. 20, 1872, a report was made of the second year up to that time, with the request to the subscribers for increased means to establish a workshop in connection, by which waste force could be utilized, by furnishing the occupation the women could be made to fill. The response was generous and ample. The large hall was fitted for a work-room; and the apartment that had served as reading-room and office was converted to a guest-chamber for strangers coming to the city, always entertained as visitors without charge, the only requisite being that they were industrious working girls, and not adventurers nor impostors.

The reading-room was supplied with books by Mr. James T. Fields. The daily and weekly newspapers are furnished by the independent press; and if the value of women as workers is underrated or overlooked by all other classes of educators, it is thoroughly understood and appreciated by the men who educate the people from the editorial chair.

Mr. Louis L. Prang also contributed eleven of his finest chromos to adorn the walls of the reading-room.

Mr. Zenus Bangs furnished two Singer sewing-machines; Mr. James H. Fowler, one Weed; and Mr. Henry C. Hayden, one Wheeler & Wilson, to the workshop. They proved a valuable acquisition at the time of the great fire, the 9th of November, in replacing the garments of the poor girls who barely escaped with their lives from restaurants and other places. Who could ever forget the first three days of trial and danger and nights of darkness, in consequence of the gas being shut off in the city? Several hundred anxious faces gathered within these walls, dimly lighted with one or two tapers, fairly panic-stricken, fearing the very worst, without means, or hope of any, as it was impossible to communicate with their employers; and many of their books were destroyed, so they had nothing to show that any thing was due them. The majority roomed in one place, and took their meals in another, and paid for them each time, and now they must go hungry. At that trying crisis Joseph Dix, Esq., called and left $50. Its value cannot be estimated, as it procured bread for some and the means to leave town for others; and, as it was the third day, before night it was ascertained that the leading firms were looking up workshops, and would need them as soon as possible. That, with the information that they would be paid off on Saturday night, was received with the happiest results; but there were many who would not be needed for a long time. But the strong were ready to help the weak.

Other donations in money, small and great, with an additional $50 from Mr. Dix, were sent in: total, $450. For want of shop-room, only the very best hands were put at work, — a small proportion indeed. Wishing to keep the others together till their places were ready for them, I purchased cotton cloth and calico sufficient to keep forty at work at a time, and paid $1 a day to the sufferers by the fire and five shillings to the others. In less than three weeks the experts were all picked out, leaving only those who had worked at other employments, and not the use of the needle. Entered upon the books the first week were eighty-six distinct trades, — subdivided they will count one hundred and fifty; proving the fact that

an ordinary woman can no more support herself to-day by the use of the needle than she could compete with four knitting-needles against the stocking-loom. Nevertheless, an ingenious worker with her needle is considered cheap at any price. As each girl found a place outside of this, hers was filled by another; and every one of them had relatives or whole families depending on them for support; and they had to walk two, three, and four miles every morning in the cold and storm, thinly clad, and many obliged to perform the household duty of those they left behind.

The manner in which they assisted each other was a pleasure to witness. When they found a place for themselves they remembered their associates, so that little companies went together. No income for their work was received, as I could not take orders to be filled by new beginners. They had practice in washing, ironing, cooking, scrubbing, and housework of all kinds, which gave me an opportunity to recommend them; and in addition to that work 645 outsiders were also supplied. Others were assisted to their friends, in some cases as far west as Omaha; others were sheltered, but not encouraged to be lazy. Too much sympathy is bad; good judgment is better.

Every day had its history, differing from the day before as much as two nations would differ from each other. Sometimes a word of encouragement, advice, or suggestion, was more valuable than any thing else.

From Feb. 20, 1872, to May 30, 1873, 760 letters have been received concerning women from distant States and territories of the far West, and from villages and towns throughout New England, including departments of State at Washington, differing in nothing but phraseology, every one implicitly expressing the same idea, to the effect that Massachusetts is afflicted with the surplus of seventy-five thousand wretched, overworked, half-paid women. Three years' close observation with all classes, from the finely-educated dependent lady down to the little girl who was obliged to sleep night after night under a pile of boards to escape the violence of an in-

toxicated parent, has furnished evidence that there is not one woman in this commonwealth who is not absolutely needed.

What the gold mines are to California and the rice swamps to Louisiana, the working women are to Massachusetts. They are here because she holds out greater inducements for them to come, and this city still greater than elsewhere. What Italy is to the artist, and Germany to the musician, Boston is to the gifted tradeswoman. A spirit of "trade-unionism" exists amongst small capitalists outside. They will not impart knowledge of their business to women, fearing the latter might have male relatives who would furnish capital, and introduce competition with themselves. The variety of one hundred and fifty occupations, and the boundless enterprise of this city, presents a grand career to a capable young woman. A glance at the shop windows will show they improve it; combining, as they do, the solidity of the English, fine taste of the French, and the economy of the American: without the latter quality no worker can be a success. Boston is like a niche that can take in a giant or a dwarf, so the very poorest come here as well as the best Housework requires that the person should be robust and sound; and in the factories, though very delicate little girls can achieve wonderful production, they must have perfect sight and nimble fingers, as every loom and frame must produce so much according to the speed. A person who lives on $2 a week here could not obtain $1 elsewhere; and besides that, a city affords poverty a grand solitude that cannot be appreciated by those who have never experienced it. The three great causes of distress are: first, waste force that should be properly utilized in youth, before the girl gets her head filled with foolish nonsense; second is a lack of physical strength, more serious than the first; the third is the burden of having others depending on them for support, and the number who are borne down by the latter cause would seem incredible. The self-denial and untiring devotion manifested by them is truly marvellous. Knowing that little girls usually commence work at the age of fourteen years, and wishing to know how long they continued, and what proportion of them

became chargeable to the State, I examined the books at the executive department; and taking in the forty-eight thousand factory operatives throughout the State and the thirty thousand shop-girls of this city, only one pauper in fifty belongs to either class. They bring youth, vigor, and intelligence to the countless industries they represent; and when exhausted, they retire, as our very bravest soldiers did, feeling they had only performed their duty.

In this connection no allusion has been made to the host of incompetent dependents, who can dance every set from eight o'clock in the evening till two in the morning, and then walk a mile or two in frosty air, and keep it up season after season, but think they are not strong enough to perform a family's washing. It is unjust to mention them as workers: their very existence is an accident, and there is not one spot in all the world where they are needed. They are ever in sight; and know how to secure work better than one who can do it, because they have so much practice in that particular. Two hundred of them will attract more attention, discussion, and sympathy than three thousand steady, quiet, efficient producers of wealth. The latter class feel ashamed to be seen when out of work: to go alone to ask for it is next to be dreaded. They have to be sought by the employers, and remain for years in a place, frequently having but one or two in a lifetime: the magic touch of their fingers is perceptible in every thing that is valuable and beautiful; and yet the individuals who contribute so much to comfort, pleasure, and adornment are as invisible as the hand of nature itself.

For financial support, the institution is wholly dependent on the following-named individuals; and no assessment is ever made for any thing, not even the excellent entertainments given from time to time.

From Feb. 20, 1872, to May 30, 1873, Received from Subscribers:

Cash	$100 00
Macullar, Williams, & Parker	100 00
Jordan, Marsh, & Co.	100 00
Gen. Horace B. Sargent	250 00
John M. Forbes	100 00
Hon. Sam'l Hooper	100 00
Henry L. Pierce	100 00
Whitten, Burditt, & Young	50 00
Fenno & Co.	50 00
Miner, Beals, & Brackett	50 00
A. A. Burrage	50 00
Hogg, Brown, & Taylor	50 00
Churchill & Watson	50 00
Hogg, Brown, & Taylor	25 00
Ditson & Co.	50 00
Stillman B. Allen	50 00
Henry Mason	50 00
E. R. Mudge, Sawyer, & Co.	50 00
Geo. C. Richardson & Co.	50 00
Charles A. Smith & Co.	25 00
Cash	20 00
Total	$1,470 00

Expenditures.

For Rent, from Jan. 25, 1872, to July 25, 1872	$200 00
At which period more room was required, and increased the rent to $1,000 per annum.	
Rent, from July 25, 1872, to April 25, 1873	750 00
Fuel and Light	107 75
Salary to assistant	245 75
Water-tax	13 25
Printing	20 00
Incidentals	25 00
Personal expense	98 25
Total	$1,470 00

Money Received for the Sufferers from November Fire.

From Lawrence, Feb. 22.

Operatives through their agents.

F. C. Clark, Agt. Pemberton Co. . . .	$100 00	
Wm. H. Salisbury, Agt. Washington Mills .	167 76	
D. W. Ayers, Agt. Everett Mills . . .	50 25	
John A. Fallon, Agt. Pacific . . .	81 75	
Chas. Wainwright, Arlington Woollen Mills	81 00	
		480 76

From Lowell, March 22, 1873.

Operatives through their agents.

Gen. J. C. Palfrey, Agt. Merrimac Mills .	$57 00	
A. G. Cumnock, Agt. Boot Cotton Manuf.	44 25	
		101 25
Relief Committee: Furniture		41 00
Sum previously acknowledged		374 00
Total		$997 01

Money Expended on Sufferers by November Fire.

In Stock to work on	$60 00
" Wages to girls	937 01
Total	$997 01

The work will be continued on the basis set forth in this report.

The path of toil is very rugged at best, and it is the duty of all to make it as easy as possible, if only by a kind look as they pass on the sidewalk; for there are many old waterproof cloaks and leather workbags that should be reserved as valued trophies side by side with the soldier's old blue coat and musket.

A Kitchen School will be added to the work. It has been postponed on account of illness. The encouragement accorded will warrant success.

All persons who believe in preventing the waste of mental and physical force that now is sadly perverted, are cordially invited to co-operate in *their own way.*

JENNIE COLLINS,
No. 815, *Washington Street.*